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REGION'S FOREST COVER GROWING

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This week, researchers, government agencies, industry, and environmental groups are meeting in Toronto to try to assess the overall environmental health of the Great Lakes. The gathering is known as the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference. And as the Great Lakes Radio Consortium's Mark Brush reports, the group says there's good news about the amount of forestland in the region:

The report prepared for this year's conference says there is more forestland in the Great Lakes Basin when comparing recent data to data collected more than a decade ago. The report's authors say forestland now covers a little over half of the basin's total land.

Constance Carpenter is with the U.S. Forest Service. She helped develop the report. She says forests are crucial to maintaining the environmental health of the Lakes.

"They do a lot of things in terms of water quality. They're able to provide conditions that really contribute to watershed health in terms of, you know, moderating flood peaks, storing water, filtering pollutants, transforming chemicals, all those things."

Carpenter says one of the reasons forestland is increasing is because fewer people are farming. She says as people leave behind fields and pasturelands, those lands often convert back to forestland. The authors caution that their data did not look at whether these forests are near lakes and streams, where their influence on the overall health of the Lakes is greatest.

For the Great Lakes Radio Consortium, I'm Mark Brush.

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